



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.



## Table and font: Who is welcome?

*An invitation to join the conversation about Baptism and Communion*

### **Communion and baptismal practices in the (ELCA Lutheran) Church**

*Francisco Javier Goitía Padilla*

Church is a grace-filled space where the One and Triune God creates, strengthens and nourishes our lives and faith as we are gathered and sent to expand God's love and work throughout creation. The Spirit blows and presents God's Word in the midst of our gathering as we sing, pray and hope embraced and marked by the means of grace: the font, the table and the pulpit. *Real presence* is affirmed in, around and under the elements, the words proclaimed, and the mutual consolation of the faithful. We live in the pendulum movement from church to life and from life to church being God's people justified by grace through faith and within the reality of *simul iustus et peccator*. Church *happens* here. How our baptismal and communion practices proclaim all these and educate us to we better understand how faith works in, within and through us? I will use three words to identify a possible way to affirm and improve our baptismal and communion practices as part of the church's ministry of word and sacrament: the vernacular, *catechesis*, and thanksgiving.

#### **The vernacular**

To worship in the vernacular was one of Martin Luther's most impressive contributions to worship reform. To worship in the vernacular is more than to sing in a different language; it is to bring life-as-it-is to the grace-filled space where God finds us. It is to bring the contingencies and blessings of our geographies, cultures and zip codes to church. It is an incarnational affirmation proclaiming God's *pro nobis* to our historical and existential selves. To my Hispanic/Latino communities this means that our worshipping practices and festivals – *quinceañeros*, *posadas*, *5 de mayo*, *Hispanic heritage month*, *la virgen de la Guadalupe*, and the like – are affirmed as part of the church's liturgical tradition. We need to appropriate our worshipping practices both in affirmative and critical ways

so that invitation, participation and efficaciousness are proclaimed as God's work and as Christological wells. Our baptismal and communion practices must embrace the Hispanic/Latino vernacular sustained by our doctrinal and theological affirmations.

### **Catechesis**

Infants, toddlers and children broaden and deepen the table as they participate, as part of a faithful baptismal affirmation, in the eucharist. This participation, without a solid *catechesis*, may be seen as *ex opere operato* or as *hocus pocus* (*pun intended!*). As pastor I find myself without resources that take into account this communion practice, which reverses the order *catechesis-participation*. We also need inclusive liturgical resources – music, prayers, ordos, etc. – that affirm this new communion chiasmus of participation-*catechesis*. This is especially important in Hispanic/Latino communities with both strong Roman Catholic and Evangelical backgrounds. We need to develop resources to equip pastors, leaders, and families. A contemporary *vernacular* commentary on Luther's Catechisms is in order!

### **Thanksgiving**

Worship is God's graceful and efficacious work for us and the people of God's thanksgiving to this unmerited gift. There is no *quid pro quo*. These *pro nobis* and thanksgiving qualities of Lutheran worship resonate with our Hispanic/Latino understandings of *familia* and *fiesta*. We need resources to relate our baptismal and communion practices with our historical and existential selves capturing our understanding of *familia* and *fiesta* and incorporating them to our doctrinal understanding and everyday lives (This includes our understanding of *real presence*). As I said above, our communities have a strong Roman Catholic and Evangelical backgrounds. These two expressions of the Christian tradition are an integral part of our neighborhoods, families and locations. Our understandings of *familia* and *fiesta*, I believe, will help our Lutheran confessional tradition to deepen its appropriation of *communio sanctorum*, the mutual consolation of the faithful, and the thanksgiving dimension of our worship experience. *Community* and *joy* are important cultural identity traits in our cultures. Our baptismal and communion practices can be articulated and experienced in a more incarnational way as we incorporate these Hispanic/Latino emphases in our normative teachings.

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